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TO AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
INFO ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
USCINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 328961

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
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SUBJECT: RADICAL ISLAM IN BRUNEI

REF: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 1085

1. CONFIDENTIAL NOFORN - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. REFTEL REFERRED TO A RECENT ARTICLE IN U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT CLAIMING RADICAL ISLAMIC GROUPS EXIST IN BRUNEI AND REQUESTING INFORMATION FROM WASHINGTON AGENCIES ON THE MATTER. WASHINGTON AGENCIES HAVE PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

3. OUR FILES INDICATE THE ONLY ISLAMIC ACTIVIST ELEMENTS CURRENTLY OPERATING IN BRUNEI ARE THE SEVERAL DOZEN MEMBERS OF THE AL ARQAM MOVEMENT, OFFICIALLY BANNED IN 1991 BUT NONETHELESS TOLERATED.

4. A CONFIDENTIAL RAND CORPORATION STUDY OF 1987 IDENTIFIED TWO ISLAMIC DAKWAH (MISSIONARY) MOVEMENTS THEN ACTIVE IN BRUNEI: THE TABLIGH MOVEMENT AND A GROUP IDENTIFIED AS THE BRUNEI KORAN READING.

5. NO INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON WHETHER THE BRUNEI KORAN READING STILL EXISTS. THE LOOSELY-ORGANIZED TABLIGH MOVEMENT--WHICH ORIGINATED IN INDIA IN THE 1950S AND REACHED SOUTHEAST ASIA VIA MALAYSIA IN THE 1970S--HAS ADHERENTS THROUGHOUT SOUTHEAST ASIA. TABLIGH CAMPAIGNS ARE TYPICALLY ORGANIZED BY LOCAL MUSLIM LEADERS OR PATRONS AND CONSIST OF GROUPS WHICH TRAVEL TO URBAN OR RURAL AREAS TO PRESENT LECTURES AND ENGAGE IN OTHER MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES THAT EMPHASIZE INDIVIDUAL PIETY AND INNER SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. THE TABLIGH CAMPAIGNS IN MALAYSIA, FOR EXAMPLE, DRAW ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY YOUNG MEN WHO FUND THEIR OWN PARTICIPATION. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE NOT VIEWED THE TABLIGH AS A "RADICAL ISLAMIC ELEMENT," ALTHOUGH THE RADICAL ABU SAYYAF GROUP IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES MAY HAVE GROWN OUT OF A TABLIGH CHAPTER.

6. ANECDOTAL REPORTING FROM A WIDE VARIETY OF SOURCES INDICATES THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE TRAVEL BY MUSLIM FIGURES BETWEEN SOUTHEAST ASIA, SOUTH ASIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST. THOUSANDS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN MUSLIMS ATTEND UNIVERSITIES IN MIDDLE EASTERN NATIONS--ON OCCASION DEFYING GOVERNMENT BANS ON TRAVEL TO PARIAS NATIONS SUCH AS IRAN, IRAQ, AND SYRIA IN ORDER TO DO SO. WE HAVE NO STATISTICS ON BRUNEI CITIZENS WHO MAY BE STUDYING IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES ABROAD. THERE IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT EXCHANGE AT THE NONGOVERNMENTAL LEVEL BETWEEN SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN/SOUTH ASIAN ISLAMIC ACADEMIC, COMMUNITY AND OTHER OPINION LEADERS. REPORTING ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THESE INDIVIDUALS IS FRAGMENTARY AND ITS IMPACT ON LOCAL MUSLIM GROUPS IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS AT THIS TIME. THE POTENTIAL EXISTS, HOWEVER, THAT THIS CONTACT COULD BE A CHANNEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGROUND RADICAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS.

7. WE ARE CHECKING ON THE MEDIA CLAIMS THAT MEMBERS OF THE IRANIAN DELEGATION THAT VISITED SOUTHEAST ASIA IN OCTOBER INCLUDED TWO SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE IRANIAN INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS, AND WILL PASS ALONG THE RESULTS OF OUR RESEARCH WHEN COMPLETE.

TALBOTT